



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
2142 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers,

We are writing to urge the Judiciary Committee to take swift action to reauthorize the "Lautenberg Amendment," which for more than two decades has been a lifeline to Jewish and other religious minorities escaping religious persecution to seek refuge in the United States.

The Lautenberg Amendment provides critical safeguards for historically persecuted groups seeking refugee status, to ease the burden of proof and permit "fast track" processing to prevent undue backlogs in the countries that host processing. Without the assurances provided by the Lautenberg Amendment, past experience has shown that safe-third countries like Austria would no longer be willing to provide transit visas to allow religious minorities to be processed on their soil. With no U.S. Embassy in Tehran, this would force persecuted Iranian religious minorities to flee to dangerous neighboring countries such as Pakistan, where – prior to the expansion of the Lautenberg Amendment to include Iran – a dozen Iranian Jews disappeared en route.

The lapse of this provision, between September 30, 2010 until it was temporarily reinstated on April 15, 2011 in the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-10), put nearly 800 Iranians seeking processing in Vienna at great risk. The uncertainty of the looming June 1, 2011 expiration of the provision would create upheaval for those in the pipeline and be perilous for Jews, Baha'is and Christians hoping to escape religious oppression and persecution in Iran.

At a time when the Ahmadinejad regime continues its campaigns of Holocaust denial and virulent anti-Zionism that demonize Jews and jails Baha'i leaders who are put on trial for their beliefs, the Lautenberg Amendment preserves a pathway to asylum that is a beacon of hope.

As the Committee determines a course of action for reauthorization, we urge you to act in an expeditious manner that will prevent a lapse in the program and avoid bringing undue attention that could put prospective refugees at risk and be exploited for propaganda to further marginalize minority groups in countries of concern.

We look forward to working with you to advance the timely reauthorization of this vital humanitarian program.

Sincerely,



HOWARD L. BERMAN
Member of Congress



HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress



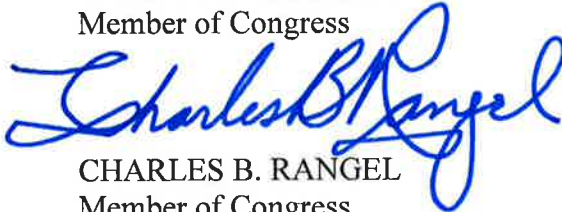
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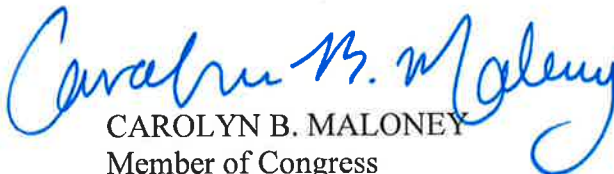
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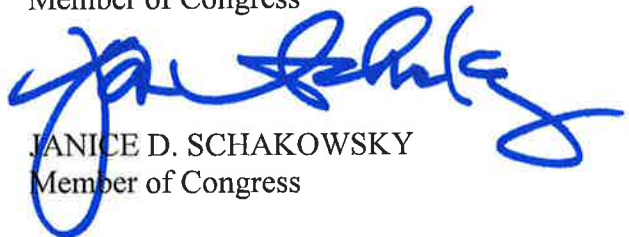
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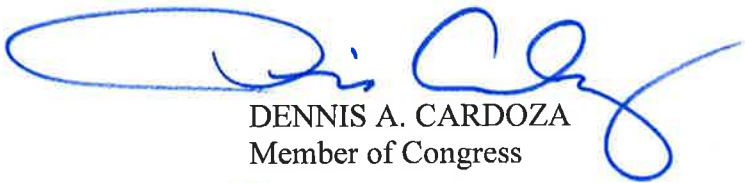
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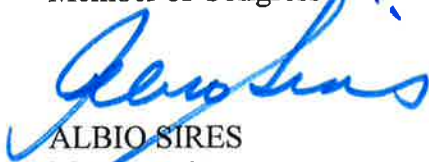
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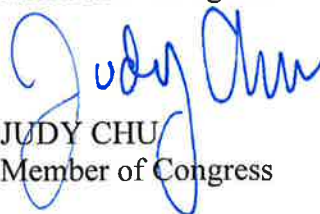
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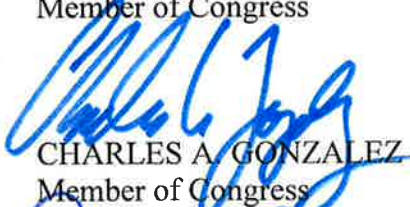
JERROLD NADLER
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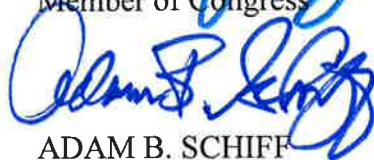
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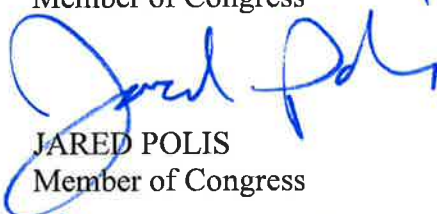
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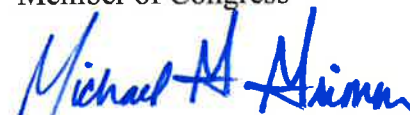
ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ
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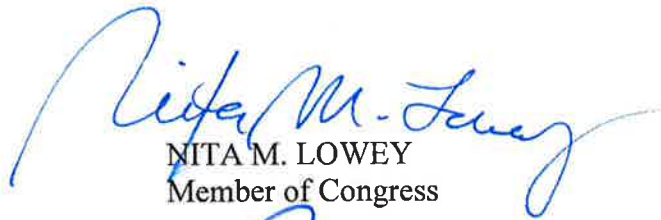
KAREN BASS
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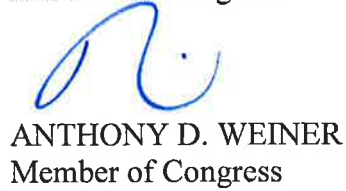
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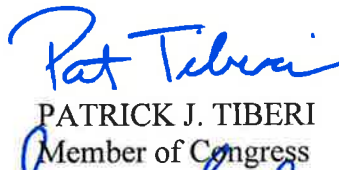
NITA M. LOWEY
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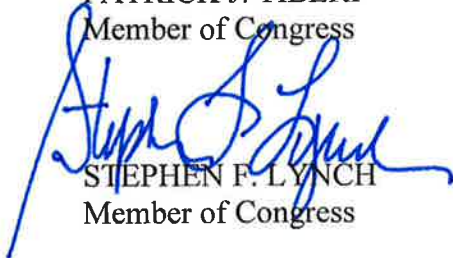
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JOSEPH CROWLEY
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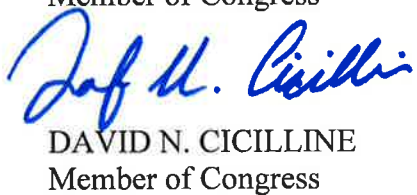
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SUSAN A. DAVIS
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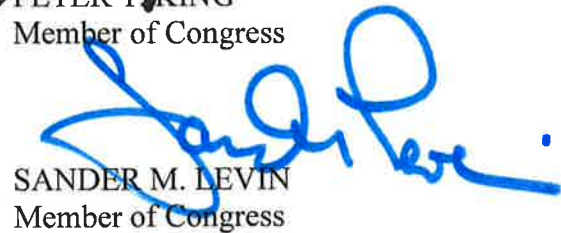
AL GREEN
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JOHN A. YARMUTH
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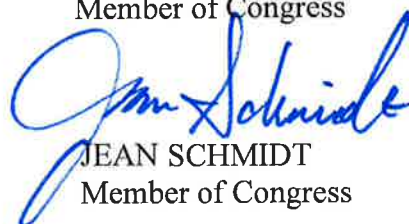
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